



Oak Hill

Since 1893, services
& solutions for people
with disabilities.

TESTIMONY

GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION & ELECTIONS COMMITTEE

MARCH 7, 2011

RE: SB 007

Eleanor A. Brooks
Blindness Related
Supports Center at
Oak Hill

Individual and Family
Supports Center at
Oak Hill

The NEAT Center
at Oak Hill

Oak Hill Birth to
Three Program

Oak Hill Camp

Oak Hill Center for
Relationship & Sexuality
Education

Oak Hill Day Services

Oak Hill Foundation, Inc.

Oak Hill Professional
Development

Oak Hill Residential
Services

Oak Hill School

120 Holcomb Street
Hartford, CT 06112

Tel (860)242-2274
Fax (860)242-3103

www.ciboakhill.org

Senator Slossberg, Representative Morin, Senator McLachlan & Representative Hwang; My name is Patrick Johnson and I am President of the CT Institute for the Blind Inc. which does business as Oak Hill. Oak Hill is the largest private non-profit agency providing community based care to people with disabilities in CT with over 100 sites in 58 towns through the state of CT. We have 1,400 employees. I am here today to testify along with my counterparts at the American School for the Deaf and the CT Children's Medical Center in opposition to the state auditors recommendation that we be prevented from rehiring select employees who have retired on state pension and were previously employed by us. First of all it is unclear to me and our General Counsel why our employees are being accused of "double dipping". There is no double dipping going on. Many private non-profit agencies hire retired state employees. State employees who were not contract administrators and retired last Friday from state service are not, to my knowledge, prohibited from coming to work at CIB or any other private business in CT. About 35% of my long term employees (Those who were hired prior to January 1, 1993) are eligible for state pensions. It is my understanding that they were made eligible for state pensions decades ago during some lean years when CT could not increase our contracts and agreed to cover pensions instead. No employee hired since 1993 has been eligible for a state pension. CIB and our colleague agencies wish to, in selective cases, rehire employees who have taken the state pension because they possess vital scarce skills or are key personnel that we can not afford to lose.

For example, we rehired in 2003, a ranking member of our Oak Hill School program who possessed state education credentialing to serve as an administrator and teacher of Braille. She is not paid by state contracts and it is almost impossible to find one person with those combined skills. Being forced to hire two people because of the credentialing issue would increase our costs. People who are fluent in sign and tactile sign language for working with children and adults who are blind and deaf/blind are scarce. We are currently training replacements for these workers but that training can take years and when the skills are acquired they may be hired away. Ironically we loose several staff each year who go to work for the State.

We remain mystified as to why this recommendation was made by the auditors and believe it is simply that they were misinformed or uninformed. What would you have us do? Allow disabled people to go without vital services? Hire each other's staff on some kind of exchange basis which seems absurd but would be legal if the state imposes this rule or recruit retired state employees from state agencies who can come to work for us even though they are on the same pension plan.

When our employees take the state pension and are rehired they lose all seniority, they are not enrolled in any additional pension other than what they may fund privately, all accrued sick days go away and all vacation days are paid out. They start over as any new employee except they are not eligible for a pension. If we did not rehire them we would have to hire someone to do the work including the possibility of another retired state employee.

If the auditor's logic on this bill holds then all retired state employees should be banned from being hired by any private business that has a contract with the state. Again I stress that there is no double dipping involved here and no conflict of interest and the passage of this bill will create a major hardship for the three private agencies involved and an infringement on our personnel hiring and human resource rights. In May of 2003 the state Attorney General ruled that this practice is not illegal. I would submit that it was intentional on the state's part to permit us in 1993 to allow this practice. Please amend the bill to remove these requirements that would force our agencies to suffer long term vacancies for skilled personnel that could put our licenses in jeopardy.

Patrick J. Johnson Jr.
President of CT. Institute for the Blind Inc.(d.b.a. Oak Hill)